



Cedric Cuthbert Ralph

19 April 1907 – 2 November 2007

On 13 December 1920 Cedric C Ralph was elected to the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, as a junior member, at the age of 13. This was a propitious event for an aspiring young lepidopterist. It was here he met Alex Burns, an entomologist who acted as a mentor and became a life-long friend. Among others, Cedric also met Charles Hamilton French, the Government Entomologist. In a tribute to Alex Burns, Ralph (1959) recalled the excitement of excursions with him and CH French to Springvale, Mt. Donna Buang, Frankston and Healesville.

Sometime in the late 1920s Cedric Ralph's membership seems to have lapsed, as his name does not appear in the 1927 or 1932 membership lists. He was re-elected as an Ordinary member in 1938, in time to become one of 'The Gang', the people who gathered once a month on Sundays at Stan Colliver's house in Essendon to discuss all aspects of natural history. These meetings came to an end with the outbreak of World War II.

As a friend who composed a eulogy in verse said of Cedric:

He preferred a night in the bush to a night in the pub,

And was made a lifetime member of the Field Naturalists Club.

That honour was accorded Cedric in 1978, to mark his 40 years of membership. On this occasion he made a generous donation of \$250 to the Club.

In 1942 Cedric Ralph joined the RAAF, and was posted to New Guinea to work on cyphers. He recorded his observations while flying over the Great Barrier Reef (Ralph 1942), and a further note from Pilot Officer CC Ralph recounted the excruciating effects of treading on a stone-fish, which someone in the camp in New Guinea did. Fortunately the man survived (Ralph 1943). In 1943 Cedric was recalled to Point Cook, where he worked as an instructor until the end of the war.



Cedric Ralph was born in Malvern in 1907 into a legal family and, in spite of his interest in natural history, literature and the arts, it was expected that he would follow his father into the legal profession. After World War II he set up his own law firm and thereafter led a distinguished career.

At the age of 82, in possession of his first computer, Cedric began to write his autobiography, in which he stated

My copious reading had brought me round to ... a Marxist interpretation of history. In the last resort it is the wealthy, those with power, who cause wars, and it is the poor who fight them.

Consequently, in 1940 he decided to join forces with that body which I thought most nearly in agreement with my conclusions and ... that was the Communist Party.

It was this affiliation that brought many clients to Cedric Ralph's practice. In 1950 he led the Victorian legal effort against the Menzies government's legislation to outlaw the Communist Party, and was the instructing solicitor to HV Evatt in this

campaign, which resulted in the repealing of the *Communist Party Dissolution Act* 1950, in March 1951. In 1954 he represented the Communist Party before the Royal Commission into the Petrov affair.

He acted for the British Migrants Association in their campaign for the improvement of conditions for the first British migrants, and he challenged the White Australia Policy on behalf of potential Asian migrants who had fought alongside the Australians against the Japanese. Although not directly involved, he advised Frank Hardy on his choice of solicitor in the libel case over *Power Without Glory*.

In 1980 Cedric Ralph and his second wife, Clare, retired to the cottage at Balook, which he had bought in 1954, now surrounded by the Tarra Bulga National Park. This was not to be a quiet time of liesurely, rural pursuits. In an effort to preserve his beloved bush Cedric took on the Australian Paper Mills over logging, and the locals called him 'the first environmentalist'. His efforts to preserve the bush and his involvement in local affairs have been recognised in the recent planting of an avenue of 100 trees in Balook.

Cedric Ralph had an extensive library, and in 2000 he donated most of his natural history books to the Club, driving up from Balook to deliver them.

Age did not weary him, but at the age of 94 he was banned from working on the roof

of his house. In 2005, aged 98, he had his driver's licence withdrawn. In the same year Cedric Ralph made headlines again during an exceptionally heavy snowstorm in the Strezelecki Ranges, when he collapsed at his home, and it took the SES four hours to clear the road so that an ambulance could reach him.

As his versifying friend recalled, once Cedric was removed from the bush to an aged care home, he frequently said 'The end can't come too soon'.

In his own words in 1995, Cedric Ralph wrote

these people [FNCV members] and no doubt first among them Alex Burns, enriched my life to such an extent that even now, daily, I experience the benefit.

He was, indeed, a true naturalist.

I have drawn heavily on Robyn Whiteley's obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald, for much of this information, and am indebted to Heather Burcombe for further detail.

References

- Ralph, CC (1942) Notes from the tropics. *The Victorian Naturalist* 59, 131.
 Ralph, CC (1943) Poison of the Stone-fish *The Victorian Naturalist* 60, 77.
 Ralph, CC (1995) A tribute to Alex Burns. *The Victorian Naturalist* 112, 106-7.

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One Hundred Years Ago

EXCURSION TO THE YOU YANGS

Three species of plants are noteworthy as characteristic of the You Yangs -viz., *Prostanthera nivea*, which should be called the "Snowy Mint-bush"; the Rock or Parsley Fern, *Cheilanthes tenuifolia*, which occurs in great patches everywhere; and the Blue Gum, *Eucalyptus globulus*, a species of eucalypt one would not expect to find in such an exposed situation. The *Prostanthera* was almost the first flower met with, and, though just past its best, the sight it presented in places was alone well worth the trip. The flowers are larger than most of our *Prostantheras*, and on some of the bushes were of quite a lilac shade. It is also worthy of remark that the plant does not appear to be inconvenienced by cultivation and clearing, for in the forest plantation, where the ground had been ploughed, it is again springing up; and in another part, where a fire had passed through it, the bushes are again branching out at the ground-level, and making good growth.

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